

Testimony Submitted to the Planning and Development Committee

H.B. No. 6596: AN ACT CONCERNING NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR
HALFWAY HOUSES

(Opposed – Written Only Testimony)

Public Hearing Date: March 6, 2009

Senator Coleman, Representative Sharkey and members of the Planning and Development Committee. I regret that I cannot attend the hearing today due to a prior commitment, however, I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to H.B. No. 6596. My name is Roberta Murtagh, and I am the Executive Director of Central Naugatuck Valley Help, Inc. We are a small private non profit agency providing human services in Waterbury, Litchfield and Torrington funded by various state agencies. Help, Inc. has provided substance abuse treatment and mental health services to individuals in residential and non-residential settings since 1970. Since that time we have provided services to well over 5,000 individuals and their families. Many of these individuals, after receiving care at one of our programs, have rebuilt their lives, been reunited with their families, and have been successfully re-integrated into their communities.

H.B. 6596 seeks to require municipal land use commissions and boards to provide notice to the chief of police, fire chief and chief elected official of any application for a proposed public or private halfway house, group home, mental health facility or approved community residence, and to establish a state-wide database of such facilities.

Our agency is very concerned about this proposed bill and the implications for our clients and our programs. The impact this legislation would contradict the foundation of both the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), and in most circumstances, privacy regulations, as outlined in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA.) This legislation appears to provide an opportunity for state-sanctioned discrimination against a disenfranchised and vulnerable population who need and receive much needed support and services from our programs, which provide these services on behalf of the state.

Our clients already have to deal with stigmatization, and it is often very difficult for them to seek and accept the help that they so desperately need. This would only be increased and reinforced through the exposure and intrusion which would result from the development of a 'registry.' The individuals we serve are working to improve their lives and overcome their addictions and/or mental illnesses and deserve the dignity of privacy and respect.

I respectfully ask you to carefully consider the unintended consequences of this proposed legislation. There are many lives that are dependent upon people's ability to access and receive treatment.

In closing, I would welcome any of you to contact me for further discussion or questions. Thank you for your time and consideration of these extremely important issues.

For additional information, Please do not hesitate to contact:

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